

[Mr. Leroy Dean]

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FOLKLORE—White Pioneer

Miss Effie Cowan, P. W.

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Interview with Mr. Leroy Dean, Mart, Texas.

“My 'mother was Miss Eliza Steele, who emigrated to America with her parents from Ireland in 1860. They landed from a boat at Galveston and came directly to this community just east of Marlin, known then as the Blue Ridge settlement. My father bought a tract of land on the upper Ridge, east of the present village of Stranger. At that time, Marlin was just a small village and the railroad had not built that far, the people did their trading at Bremond and Kosse, which was eight miles to the east. The present community known as Odds was also within a few miles of their home.

“These communities were known an Rocky Creek and Steele's Creek, the latter creed was named for my grandfather, Steele. My father's name was Lon Dean, who came from Mississippi to Texas just after the close of the Civil War, in 1866. He was a soldier in the Lost Cause and surrendered his arms at Appomattox. He fought in a number of battles but

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came out unharmed. When he first came to Texas, he located at Bryan, Texas, where he lived for a few years and helped to build several brick buildings which are standing today. About 1869 or 1870, he came to the present communities of Stranger and Odds. There he met my mother and they were married 1870. They lived in this community, where they reared their family. C.12 [????]

My parents had nine children who lived to be grown; they were: Lizzie, David, Leon, myself, Eva, Arthur, May, Cleveland and Herman. Grandfather Steele built the first gin in the community, between Stranger and Odds. It was operated by ox-power, long before horses were used. 2 "In the days before there were the communities of Odds, Stranger, Eureka, Ogdon, or the other little settlements on Blue Ridge, or close by, the country was part prairie, part lowland and part timber, surrounding the Ridge. I can recall, as a boy, how we used to roam over the wooded part, up and down the creeks hunting for birds of all kinds and wild turkeys, and hogs. We learned the lore of the birds and the woods, to understand the wild life was part of our education. It was our delight to listen to the talk of the older men as they discussed the politics of the day; or the latest hanging; or the newest committee of Vigilants who were organized to help the officers to see that the law was upheld. For, at that time, law enforcement was yet in its infancy in Texas.

"The organization known as "Quantrell's Men", [whowere?] bushwhackers during the Civil War had some members who lived after the war in our nearby town of Marlin, Texas. There were three or four whom my father knew well. These were Major Swann, a lawyer of Marlin; Stump Ashby, another lawyer, and Professor Lattimore, father of the late Professor John Lattimore, who was at one time the County School Superintendent of Falls County. After the Civil War ended, and the days of Reconstruction required the best of men to help to uphold the law, there was a committee of men formed called Vigilants

These men who had belonged to Quantrell's Organization were among the first to help to make Texas a place unsafe for criminals. The course of the law being so often delayed and not enforced caused many a man to be dealt with without recourse to a trial by jury.

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I remember that in our own community there was an example of this. It was the hanging of one of the neighborhood men, Milt Brothers, *ho was accused of cattle theft. 3 ["?]"

"Another instance of taking the law into ones own hands was the killing of a Mr. Heaton, who was a Northern man who came to this country soon after the end of the Civil War. He owned a ranch in the community now known as Mart, but at that time it was known as Willow Springs. This was east of Big Creek and twelve miles north of the Odds settlement. He was killed in a dispute about some cattle that he had bought from the widow Walker. Her son, Abner Walker, was accused and tried by jury and sent to the penitentiary for life for this murder. He only stayed there eighteen years. He was pardoned and came home a broken man. He plead his innocence to the last day of his life. From later evidence, it was believed that he really was innocent and that another party was guilty. But this revelation came to late to remedy the result of circumstantial evidence which sent him to the pen. In those days of hasty judgment, there were perhaps many men who suffered for the crimes of others.

"The first post office in the Odds community was about a mile north west of the present Odds store, at [the?] cross roads. It was on the Milam-County-Waco road and the post master was named "Noon Curlee." This post office was known an Olcott. W. J. Durham, a son of M. T. Durham who came with his family to the community from Georgia soon after the Civil War ended, built the store at what was known as Criswell Lake. Mr. Durham became post master and the name of the post office was called Ogden for George Ogden who lived in the community. At present he lives at Marlin. Both of these post offices disappeared with the coming of Uncle Sam's rural route system; but a store had been located at Odds. It was more favorably situated on the cross county roads and Bill Cooper and W. J. Durham had built a gin in 1899. So the name Odds remained with this community. The present site of the Odds post office was selected 4 "In 1891. It was at a store owned by Frank Adair, its first postmaster. A man named Diezell carried the mail. It was in the day before good roads and automobiles, and so the mail carriers either rode or drove a pair of mules in wet weather to a buggy or cart.

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“When they arrived at the spot where the Methodist Church now stands a few hundred yards west of what is called Buffalo Mott, the black land in the low valley often became so muddy that the mail carriers had to unhitch his team, tie the mail on one of the animals and ride the other, driving the mule with the mail, across the mud hole. But the beginning of the Odds community dates back before this time.

“Perhaps the first to settle on the hills and valleys of the Odds community were the families of Jim and John Erskine. These families left many descendants who are still living. About the same time, the Erskines came, the [McAllistors?] arrived from Blue Ridge in 1856, according to local history. Then, the William Criswell family came next, and about the same time, the M. T. Durham family came from Georgia. According to Mrs. T. L. Criswell, of Marlin, who is a daughter of Mr. Durham, they came soon after the Civil War. Some of the older people hold memories of one, C. C. Clock, who never married and who lived in the community in the seventies and was supposed to have come from “up North”. There were two other early settlers, L. Vioson and Zack Cockburn, who lived in the community for awhile but went away.

“The A. W. McDaniels family came in the early eighties, and built a home on the rocks on the hill which is another outcropping of the famous Balcones Fault which extends almost across the State in a [northeasterly?] direction. The McDaniel house stands today and is one of the oldest homes in the Odds community. The other early houses have been removed or torn down. The rocks are there, as they have been for ages, and the spot is still known to some of the older inhabitants as “Old Buffalo Mott.”

“‘Buffalo Mott’ was a famous stopping place or identifying place in the early days when cowboys ruled the prairies. The outcropping of rocks-at this place was an easy marking for directions to go by, and so ‘Buffalo Mott’ became a well known spot. Before the days of the Texas cowboy, the spot was famous as a meeting place for hunting buffalo. These

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animals were found in the hills and valleys around the spot which afforded a choice grazing meadow.

“There was a large tree which stood in this vicinity within a few feet of the McDaniel home. Until a few years ago, nearly every cow boy carved his initials on this tree. As the tree grew in age, the markings grew with it and the initials carved in the bark assumed grotesque shapes. The letters grew upward as the tree grew. Not many years ago this tree died and with passed many a story which, could it have talked been told of the gatherings of hunters and cowboys under its spreading branches.

“The gin built by W. J. Durham and Bill Cooper in 1899 burned about 1900 and was replaced by Frank Adair who owned the store at Odds. When Mr. J. C. McClelland married he bought the land with the gin. He married the daughter of the man who owned the old Chisum Ranch. ([Chishum?]) This land finally became the property of the Marlin Oil Company.

“J. C. McKinley and family moved into the Odds community about the year 1889 and John Shipp came there in 1894. Tom Cleaver is another early settler. It is not known where he moved or where his descendants are now. Tom Garrett now lives at Kosse bug was prominent in the Odds and Stranger communities for years and several of his sons and daughter daughters 6 now live in either the Odds or Stranger communities. In fact, because of the close connection between the Odds, Stranger and Blue Ridge communities and their families, they are very closely related.

“About the time of the Civil War, the records show that land could be bought in the Odds community for \$2.50 to \$5.00 per acre. Many of the modern farms of this section, according to the deeds, came from the 'R. A. Skinner Survey'; the Stephen's Section'; the 'Bracy Section'; and h the Chisum Ranch'. The McDaniel home on the hill was built in 1885, but has been remodeled since then. This family came from Georgia, soon after the

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Civil War. Mr. McDaniel is known as "Tom"s but his initials are A. W. He is a Confederate veteran. Mrs. McDaniel is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. McKinley.

"Another interesting family is that of Reuben Springfield. Mrs. Springfield is a daughter of the pioneer settler, William Erskine, but she was reared by her uncle, James Erskine. Mr. and Mrs. Springfield observed their fifty-fourth wedding anniversary on the 24th day of December 1938.

"The old McAllister home, built of logs, in the fifties, was located a short distance from the Odds store and gin. It burned a few years ago. As far as I know not a person was arrested for violation of the law in the Odds community during the last forty years. I have been a constable and deputy sheriff of Precinct #2, McLennan County for many years.

"It is a long time since I sat around the fire and listened to the men who had belonged to the bush whackers in the Civil War days. They often spent the night at my father's home and told of their experiences during the Civil War. And it seems today as I look into the days of my boyhood and recall the stories of how they dealt out justice 7 in the hasty way of that day, so it became my ambition to be of service in helping to keep law and order. It has been a privilege to me to be numbered among those in the community in which I have lived to be among the men who helped to uphold the low.

"In 1901 I married Miss Ella Bailey of Nart, Texas. To us were born four children. They were: Velma, Ellen, Ira, Lee and Blanche. All are still living. My first wife died in 1934 and in 1935 I married Mrs. Rosia Smith, my wife now.

"While most all of those who lived in the days of reconstruction have passed to that mysterious realm where all must go, what they did, how they did it, are still living in our memories. Their generation was the generation of our forefathers and, as our minds dwell on the past, once again their spirit seems to hover o'er us and bids us hold fast to the

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example set by them so long ago. The influence of their lingering personalities are held in our minds and we hallow their memory for their quiet, unassuming love of their fellow-man.